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SALT Is Not a Favor to Moscow

There's no point in railing against the political climate that impelled President Carter to ask the Senate to delay the strategic arms limitation treaty. There is little chance of winning a two-thirds vote unless Soviet troops withdraw from Afghanistan soon, and that is unlikely. But SALT II, and the arms control process, remain beneficial to both sides, even more so now. If they must be put on a back burner, there is considerable point in at least keeping them warm.

The chief danger, obviously, is that if both SALT II and the SALT process chill, an uncontrolled arms race will resume. The State Department has announced that, pending ratification, the United States will continue to abide by the terms of SALT II, as well as SALT I, if the Russians do. Mr. Carter has rightly asked, and the Senate leadership has agreed, that the treaty be kept on the calendar, ready for debate at the first opportunity. But the possibility of a vote later this year would be greater had the President not linked SALT to the Afghanistan issue. The national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, stated a more promising position only last Sunday, in the wake of the Soviet invasion:

"SALT is not a favor to the Soviet Union, SALT is not a Soviet favor to the United States. SALT is a strategic accommodation in the most dynamic aspect of the relationship. If that relationship was even worse than it is today, we would need SALT even more then, because SALT introduces strategic stability. . . whether there are Soviet troops in Kabul or whether Soviet troops are marching back to Tashkent."

How long strategic stability and the SALT process can be preserved without ratifying SALT II depends first of all on Moscow. Its strategic programs are already constrained, both by the new treaty and by the expired 1972 SALT I treaty limitations that have been continued informally pending the new treaty. SALT II would, for example, limit the Soviet Union to testing

and deploying only one new type of missile and a maximum of 10 warheads on big missiles capable of carrying 30. If the test restrictions are violated now, it will be impossible later to verify that Moscow is conforming. Without such verification, Senate ratification of the treaty is almost surely impossible. None of these limitations are binding until the treaty is ratified, but Moscow already is conforming. There is no way to know how long it will continue to do so.

Another problem is that the expired SALT I agreement on offensive missiles requires Moscow to dismantle older missiles and missile submarines as it deploys new ones. Moscow has continued reporting what it has done at semi-annual meetings of the Standing Consultative Commission. It made such a report last fall. Will it make another report in March — or argue, as it can, that the SALT I limitations lapse without ratification of SALT II? If old missiles are kept in service and more warheads are added to new missiles, the Soviet Union could expand its missile force more rapidly than the United States could build "racetrack" bunkers for its new, mobile MX missile.

The future of the \$40-billion MX program will come into question if it begins to appear that SALT II ratification is out. Without the SALT limits on Soviet missile and warhead numbers, even 4,600 horizontal surface shelters will not be enough to hide effectively 200 MX missiles. There will be pressure to go back to an earlier scheme for vertical underground shelters that look like present Minuteman silos — a scheme that would make SALT agreements unverifiable.

For the moment, almost any measure to punish Moscow for invading Afghanistan is popular in Congress. But delaying and possibly killing SALT could punish the United States as well. It could add \$30 billion to American military spending over the next decade, Defense Secretary Brown has warned. Every effort must be made to keep the ratification delay as short as possible and, meanwhile, to keep the treaty alive.